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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides information and guidance for parents in Great Britain on dealing with bullying at school. It defines bullying, describes how families can identify if a family member is being bullied, and outlines how schools are trying to create an atmosphere where bullying is not tolerated. It also discusses how to "bully-proof" children by preparing them to cope with bullying behaviors and pressures at all stages in school and how to talk about bullying to children. In addition, the booklet suggests ways siblings and friends can help. It discusses what parents can expect schools to do, identifies problem areas where bullying is likely to occur, and recommends actions to take if the school seems to be doing nothing to address the issue. Strategies being used to reduce bullying incidents are described, including assertive discipline, bully boxes and courts, counseling, mediation, peer counseling, and the "shared concern" method. The booklet then highlights ways families can work jointly with schools to prevent bullying and deal with it when it does occur. How to deal with schools outside local authority control is highlighted, and other organizations to contact for help are described. A listing of organizational and print resources is included. (KB)

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Bullying at School

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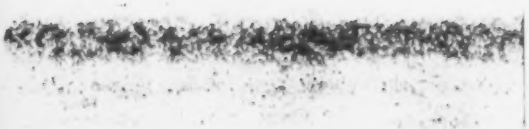
Spotting the signs Last resort action

Bullying at School

ADVICE FOR FAMILIES

Andrew Mellor



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The booklet also forms part of a pack for schools called *Supporting Schools Against Bullying*. Also in the pack are a booklet for headteachers, information sheets and discussion materials. It aims to encourage the whole school community to work together to fight bullying.

Further information may be available on SCRE's Website at http://www.scre.ac.uk

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Contents

Taking action against bullying 1

What is bullying and what can you do about it? 2

Contacting the school 3

Being bullied 4

Words hurt 5

Families can help 6

Spotting the signs of bullying 7

But he doesn't want me to go to the school 8

Brothers, sisters and friends 9

Bullying others 10

What can you expect the school to do? 11

Problem areas – in school and out 12–13

If your school seems to be doing nothing 14

Ways schools react to bullying incidents 15–17

Preventing bullying 18

Joint action – schools and families 19–21

Starting at a new school 22

Schools outwith local authority control 23

Help and advice beyond the school 24–26

Last resort action 27

Reading about bullying 28–29

Bullying cannot be stopped by pupils, parents or teachers acting alone

Taking Action Against Bullying

Being bullied is a frightening experience. No-one likes to think that it will happen to them or to people they know and care about. But bullying does happen to some children and many more find themselves on the fringes of it by being aware that it is happening. Everyone can play a part in reducing the damage bullying does.

► Bullying cannot be stopped by pupils, parents or teachers acting alone. Schools are finding new ways of tackling bullying. All of these aim to get people talking about the problem and working together to find solutions. Although this is not easy, it is the only effective way to stop bullying.

► Young people who are being bullied feel powerless to stop it happening. They may be angry, frightened or bewildered. They are unable to concentrate on their lessons. Some pretend to be ill or truant because they are so frightened. A few have even taken their own lives. They lose confidence in themselves, and this low self-esteem may have life-long consequences. It is important that all children and young people become aware of what bullying is and how their actions affect the lives of others. Encouraging the development of social and moral awareness is the responsibility of both home and school.

► The families of people who are being bullied feel angry and frustrated on their behalf. These emotions are natural. You have a right to feel angry if your child is bullied at school. But strong feelings sometimes lead to actions which may make the situation worse rather than better. Of course bullies must expect to be punished, but punishment alone will not solve the problem. Unless it is backed up by other actions, it may just drive it underground. Parents, families, teachers and pupils must all be prepared to talk and work together so that everybody understands how others feel ■

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In this book you will find guidance on what to do if you think someone in your family is being bullied; and information on how schools are trying to tackle bullying.

If you are worried discuss this with a teacher.

What is Bullying and What Can You Do About It?

► Bullying is not easy to define. Sometimes it involves hitting or kicking. But threats, teasing, and taunting are more common and can be more damaging.

► The word 'bullying' is used to describe many different types of behaviour ranging from teasing or deliberately leaving an individual out of a social gathering or ignoring them, to serious assaults and abuse. Sometimes it is an individual who is doing the bullying and sometimes it is a group.

► The important thing is not the action but the effect on the victim. No-one should ever underestimate the fear that a bullied child feels.

This advice sums up the most important actions to take –

- If someone in your family is being bullied at school – you have to do something to help: you must talk to a teacher.
- If you are worried that someone in your family may be bullied – discuss this with a teacher.
- If you want to help rid schools of bullying – work with the teachers to make schools safer and happier.
- If you are not satisfied with the school's response, do not give up – other sources of help are available.
- Support and understanding at home are important in helping people to cope with bullying – do all you can to help children and young people value themselves.
- Children and young people who witness or become aware of bullying may be unsure what to do and whether they should tell someone. Make sure they know that they should talk to a parent or teacher, and why ■

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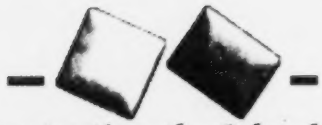
The key messages to get across to the person being bullied are:

- **It's not your fault that you are being bullied**
- **You don't have to face this on your own.**

Be persistent



Contacting the School

If someone in your family is being bullied at school you should tell someone at the school but you must talk through what you are doing with your child (see page 8).

► The best person to speak to is someone you already know and trust. In a primary school, you could ask to speak to your child's class teacher or to a senior teacher. In secondary schools, there are guidance teachers or teachers responsible for pastoral care. Some schools also have teachers who are responsible for particular classes or year groups. It is helpful if the person you contact has a senior position within the school but it is most important to choose someone who will take your concerns seriously

► If you do not know anyone in the school, or if your concerns are very serious or urgent, go to the school or telephone and ask to speak to the headteacher. Sometimes you will be able to speak to the head at once. If this is not possible, insist on speaking to someone else. Most schools will make sure that there is always someone available, during term time, to answer urgent enquiries.

► If you are unsure who would be the best available person to speak to, ask the school secretary.

► If it is an adult who is doing the bullying, contact the headteacher.

► Before you speak to the school you will find it useful to note down details of the bullying with as much information as possible.

► You must make the teachers understand the harm that the bullying is doing to your child ■

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If you cannot speak to someone at once, be persistent. Stay as calm as possible.

Bullying is serious and should be dealt with immediately.

Being Bullied

► Anybody can become the victim of bullying. All it takes is to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Bullies try to justify what they are doing by emphasising that the victim is different in some way. This may be a real difference which makes them especially vulnerable. For example, they may:

- have a different colour of skin
- speak with a different accent
- have a disability
- wear different clothes
- have a different belief or religion
- come from a particular part of town.

But, if there is no real difference, the bullies may invent one.

► Not all children who are different are bullied and some victims never know why they have been singled out:

> *"When I was at primary school I got picked on non-stop for two years. No-one talked to me. I hadn't done anything to get blamed for, and I still don't know the reason I got picked on. I wasn't any wealthier or poorer or a different race.*
>
> *I used to cry myself to sleep every night. I was miserable. My parents knew and they talked to the headmaster but he wasn't interested and said he couldn't do anything about it. My parents knew all the bullies' parents. One girl even lived in the same street and we had been friends since we were two. Like a sheep she dumped me because no-one else talked to me. This all happened in primary 6 and I have lost nearly all my self-confidence and hate being on my own. I'd hate to think this was happening to anyone else. I have a fear that if one girl doesn't talk to me they will all start again and it will never stop. I don't want it to go on for the rest of my school life. I couldn't cope."* (14 year old girl)

► Most schools tackle topics about differences in lessons. This can help to reduce bullying. What do teachers cover in personal and social education or in religious education? Ask your school for information ■

"The important thing is the effect on the victim."

Words Hurt

"Anyone can take a good kicking. Bruises go away but anything anyone says does not." (14 year old boy)

It is not only deliberate taunts that cause harm. Adults must try to understand when we should, and should not, challenge the use of certain words. Some words (including racial taunts or name-calling about a disability) should never be tolerated. But gentle, humorous teasing is not always harmful and happens in most human relationships. Nicknames, which seem hurtful to a bystander, can be a symbol of acceptance or belonging to a group – a sort of badge of membership.

► The important thing is how the person who is being teased, or called a name, feels about it. If it is meant as a joke, and taken that way by the recipient, there is no need to intervene. But if a child or young person is being inwardly hurt by repeated remarks or taunts, it is time to act. At the very least, the children who are doing the bullying must be helped to understand the harm their 'bit of fun' is causing.

► Adults also have to think about the words they themselves use. Well intentioned adults may describe a youngster as a 'victim', or a 'bully' (indeed, these words are used in this book as a short way of describing people who are being bullied or bullying others) but we must be careful not to label individuals.

► Repeatedly using the word 'victim' to a person who is being bullied can shatter a fragile sense of self-esteem. It can reinforce a feeling common amongst the victims of bullying that they are in some way to blame for what has happened.

► Bullying is a despicable act which must be unreservedly condemned. But if young people are labelled as 'bullies' they may well try to live up to that image. If we want to be successful in altering such behaviour we have to believe that 'bullies' are capable of changing how they behave ■

If a child or young person is being inwardly hurt by repeated remarks or taunts, it is time to act.

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"Your child needs your confidence and understanding"

Families Can Help

"When I was being bullied I found it hard to tell my parents (especially my Dad) because they always tell stories about how, when they were young, if anyone hit them then they got what for. So when I told them I was being bullied they expected me to do the same. But I couldn't. When they asked me how I'd got on, I told them I'd sorted it out when really I hadn't. It's not just because I'm afraid. I don't believe in violence." (12 year old boy)

► The victims of bullying need the support of their families, teachers and friends. Grandparents and other adults are keen to listen and to help but any advice given must be appropriate. It is not realistic to expect a child to ignore repeated taunting. Telling a bullied child to hit back seldom works.

► Children being bullied often hide this from their parents because they are frightened of what the bullies will do if they tell, or because, like the boy above, they are frightened of their parents' reaction. Children bullying others either hide this from their parents or present them with an edited version of events. If your child is involved in bullying, whether as a victim, a bully, or a bystander, he or she needs your confidence and understanding. Listen to your child. Trust your child. But bear in mind that you may not have the full story.

► Families can also help in maintaining a child's self-esteem and self-confidence. Find ways of showing your child that you value him or her and that you understand how important it is to have friends at school. Being patient may not be easy. Helping someone who is hurt can be very frustrating.

► Young people may find it easier to talk to someone they trust who isn't closely related to them. Encourage your child to confide in a teacher if this is easier than talking to you.

► *Telling* is different from *telling tales*. You do the first when you are worried and need help. You do the second when you just want to get someone else into trouble. If your family has talked about bullying in a general way, including when it is right to tell, your children will be better prepared to help themselves and others ■

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"Take an interest – but ask questions carefully."

Spotting the Signs of Bullying

There is no foolproof way of knowing that a child is being bullied. Physical injuries are rare. Other signs, such as unexplained illnesses or a reluctance to go to school, may have other explanations.

► However changes in behaviour (such as unwillingness to go to school, doing less well at school, deciding to give up on interests and hobbies) may indicate that something is wrong and should not be dismissed as 'growing pains'.

► Take an interest in his or her friends. Ask what happens at morning interval, lunch time and on the journey to and from school. Remember that your child may be very reluctant to talk to you about bullying and may not be sure what bullying is. Questions have to be asked carefully. Persistent questioning is stressful and may make young people even less willing to talk! Teenagers often find it particularly difficult to talk to adults about something which they think that they should be able to handle on their own.

► If you are still worried, make an appointment at once to speak to someone at school. Even if the teachers cannot explain what is wrong, they will now be alert to the possibility of a problem.

► Whatever you do, don't rush to confront the parents of a child whom you believe is bullying yours – or who are accusing your child of bullying theirs. Arguments between parents usually make the bullying worse rather than better. They will probably have heard a different version of events. They will certainly want to protect their child from accusations of bullying ■

Trust your instincts. If you are worried, discuss your worries frankly with your child.

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"If there is a problem which must be discussed with the school, take time to persuade your child."

But He Doesn't Want Me to go to the School...

If your child begs you not to intervene, you will have to take into account what has happened, and your child's age and personality.

It can be very difficult to know what to do for the best especially when teenagers are involved. One mother decided not to contact the school. Her 15 year-old daughter told her she was being called 'awful names' at school but begged her mother not to make a fuss. They talked and talked about what was going on. After a 'year of hell' things worked out. If the girl had been younger, would this mother have acted in the same way?

► Whatever you decide to do, it is vital to consider both your child's physical and emotional safety, and the effect that your actions could have on your relationship with your child. If, after talking it over, you decide that there is a serious problem which must be discussed with the school, then take whatever time is needed to persuade your child that this is what must happen. Even if agreement is only reluctantly given, this is better than over-riding or ignoring the young person's views.

► Many adults think that young people say nothing because they fear retaliation if they tell, but this is not the only fear. Many bullied children say that they keep quiet because they fear that talking to adults will just make things worse. They may fear that they will be ignored, or that they will be told that it is their own fault for not standing up to the bullies – or they may fear that a well-meaning adult will act in a clumsy way and so provoke the retaliation which bullies always threaten as a way of hiding their actions ■

Always try to work through the school but always talk with your child about what you are doing and why.

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"Talk to somebody.
Don't do nothing!"

Brothers, Sisters and Friends

Brothers, sisters and friends often know that someone is being bullied long before teachers and parents do.

► What should they do? Sometimes the person being bullied asks them not to do anything. Sometimes they do nothing in case the bullies start to pick on them.

► But doing nothing usually means that the bullying carries on, or that the bullies become more confident and choose more victims. Part of the fun that bullies get comes from the reaction of bystanders. If you do nothing the bullies may think that you approve of what they are doing.

Here are some things you can do. If any of them do not work, don't give up. Try something else.

- ☑ Persuade the person being bullied to talk to an adult – this may be a teacher or a parent.
- ☑ Encourage the person being bullied to talk to you about what is happening.
- ☑ Offer to speak to an adult on the bullied person's behalf.
- ☑ Let the bullies know that you are not so frightened of them that you will do nothing and that you are determined to see that they stop.
- ☑ Raise the issue of bullying with the student council (if the school has one) or in discussions in subjects like English, drama, religious education, or social education.
- ☑ Involve as many people as possible. In particular try to make sure that teachers know what is going on – but, most of all, talk to somebody.

Here are some things you should NOT do.

- ☒ Do not use violence against the bullies – you may end up being accused of being a bully yourself.
- ☒ Do not tell the person being bullied to deal with the problem on their own – if they could they wouldn't have asked you for help.
- ☒ Do not try to deal with things on your own ■

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Discussions help pupils make their own decisions

Bullying Others

Experts say there are two reasons why people bully others. One is because they enjoy the feeling of power it gives them. The second is because members of a group can feel closer to each other by picking on an 'outsider'.

► Children have their own explanations –

"When people bully people it may not be their fault because, say they are going about in a group, they may be bullied into bullying someone else." (14 year old girl)

"I do bully sometimes but I do not mean to. My uncle used to hit me as a child and now I hit other people." (15 year old boy)

"I have never actually set out to bully someone. It usually comes about when someone is being annoyed and provides an amusing reaction that I begin to join in. At the time you do not see it as bullying, although you may have doubts later. I do not think there is anyone at school who has not bullied someone in one way or another." (16 year old boy)

These statements tell us important things about bullying:

- Bullies can also be victims.
- Bullies often think that what they are doing is 'just a bit of fun'.
- When a group bullies an individual there may be little sense of guilt because of the shared responsibility – but the effect on the victim can be all the more devastating because of the loneliness the victim feels.

► Many schools now recognise the importance of helping young people to understand the power of peer pressure, the feeling of wanting to belong and be like everyone else. Discussions in personal & social education, religious education and health education classes, aim to help pupils make their own decisions rather than be swept along by the group. Discussions also focus on personal rights and social responsibilities. This helps youngsters to understand the effect that their actions can have, and to appreciate the part that they could play in ruining someone's life ■

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"You can expect to be taken seriously"

What can you Expect the School to do?

As a minimum, you have a right to expect that if your child is being seriously upset by the actions of others, this is taken seriously by the school. What will actually happen will depend on individual circumstances. Punishment may help to deter bullying and it can be a clear signal of a school's disapproval of bullying behaviour but there are reasons why schools sometimes use other methods of dealing with bullying. Before bullies can be punished there must be a clear case against them but establishing the facts can take a long time and may not even be possible. Meanwhile the bullying continues. A school's priority is to stop bullying at an early stage and to reduce the chance of it happening again, not to wait until it has become serious enough for the bullies to be punished.

► Your aim, and the school's, should be to provide a safe environment where your child can achieve his or her full potential. Whether your child is being bullied or is bullying others, try to remember that bullies may need help as well as punishment. They may need help to come to terms with personal problems or to understand the effect of their actions. Members of a bullying gang may feel little sense of guilt if all they have done is to call someone names in 'fun'.

► The key to stopping bullying is getting those involved to talk about what is happening. The school may well decide that it is a good idea to get the parents, as well as the children, together. But this will only do any good if there is a calm atmosphere and a common desire to bring an end to bullying.

Victims' parents often become very angry when schools seem not to punish bullies. Be patient if the school does seem to be trying to help. Bullying is a difficult problem which is not easy to solve ■

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Schools share a responsibility with families for the safety and personal and social development of pupils. That includes making sure that they are not bullied. You can expect the school to tell you what it is doing. You have the right to ask.

"Conditions can generally be improved to make them safer."

Problem Areas – In School and Out

While bullying can happen anywhere, certain areas are more dangerous. Conditions in these areas can generally be improved to make them safer.

► Schools have a responsibility to make sure that pupils are not bullied during the school day. It does not matter where the pupils are: in a classroom, the playground, the toilets or even outside school on an excursion.

► How far schools accept responsibility for pupils outside school (including during the lunch hour or on the way to and from school) depends very much on the headteacher. This is the greyest of grey areas. Bullying outside school often starts in school ("we'll get you later"). Or young people may be bullied by outsiders because they go to a particular school. In any event, parents should always let the teachers know what is going on. Even if the school does not accept responsibility, you should be given guidance on the correct person to contact. Often the school will take up the matter on your behalf.

► A questionnaire survey or a mapping exercise can help to identify problem areas. For example, in geography, pupils are sometimes asked to construct a map of the school. If they are asked to mark in those areas which they think are safe and unsafe, this can provide valuable information for the school. Less formally, discussions in class can help to pinpoint areas pupils regard as unsafe. (However once areas are identified as 'unsafe', action has to be taken.)

The school grounds

Even supervised playgrounds usually have hidden corners that are difficult to oversee. It is unreasonable to expect pupils always to be in sight of an adult. However, it is even more unreasonable to lock them outside a building and force them together with little to do. If this happens at your school, ask the School Board or governing body or parent teacher association to discuss the provision of common room facilities, and improvements to the playground and supervision

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"Dealing with bullying outside school needs active co-operation."

arrangements. Pupils themselves will have strong views and should be consulted. This can be made into an educational project which involves mapping, design and economics, with a visible outcome which will be of real benefit to the young people themselves. Some schools encourage pupils to spend their breaks constructively by providing games and play equipment and by organising special events and competitions. Young people are more likely to behave in a civilised way if they are allowed to spend their leisure time in civilised surroundings doing interesting things.

School buses

If bullying is happening on a bus provided by a local authority then parents can expect the school to do something about it. However there are a large number of pupils who travel to school on public transport. If the school refuses or is unable to become involved in such cases then parents should contact the police or transport operator directly.

Walking to and from school

Young people walking to school face various hazards – not only from bullies. The steps we take to protect them from bullying should not conflict with what we do to protect them from abuse by adults or from physical danger. An alternative route home to avoid the bullies is not necessarily safer if it means walking through unsupervised parks and streets. 'Young' children should always be accompanied by an adult. (But how young is young? Where you live can be as important as age.) Older children should be encouraged to walk in groups. However, children are sometimes bullied by their friends, so encourage them to tell you, or a teacher, at once, if anything upsetting happens while walking to or from school.

► Dealing with bullying outside school needs the active co-operation of pupils, parents, teachers, other schools, the police and the general public, particularly those living near a school. Teachers are in the best position to seek this co-operation, even though they may well feel that they have no powers to intervene in events outside school ■

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If Your School Seems to be Doing Nothing...

"I do not think bullying is a big problem in this school I do not think we need to do more work on it." (Assistant Head)

Such attitudes are not common but they do exist. A parent told this may well think that all the teachers in a school think the same way but this is not at all likely to be true. The following pages give examples of approaches schools use to respond to bullying episodes and of ways schools and parents have worked together.

If you are worried about incidents concerning your child:

- Insist on speaking to another teacher. Stay calm. Be persistent.
- If you are concerned about incidents involving your child, offer to help the school in any way that you can.
- Accept any support offered to your child but make sure that the school works with all the pupils involved.
- Consider, and act on, the suggestions on pages 24 to 27 of this book. In particular contact the local authority or governing body responsible for your school.

► If you are worried about bullying in general, try to spread your concern to as many people as possible. Speak to a member of the School Board, or to a governor. Ask the headteacher if the school has a written policy on bullying as schools are officially encouraged to have. Remind the head that all state schools in the UK were sent the government-sponsored pack *Action Against Bullying*. This said: "the single most important thing a school can do to prevent bullying is to have a clear policy to which staff, pupils and parents are committed." Ask what steps have been taken to follow this advice.

You should not exaggerate the scale of the problem and you should emphasise that your sole aim is to encourage the school to tackle bullying effectively and to create a safe learning environment for present and future pupils. If you are getting nowhere, put your concerns in writing to the headteacher, School Board chair or chair of the governors. ■

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"No single method can be used to deal with all bullying incidents"

Ways Schools React to Bullying Incidents

Personal safety is now high on the agenda of all schools. The physical and emotional risks to pupils from hazardous activities, other pupils and adults cannot be completely removed but they can be reduced. The actions which schools take to protect children from bullying can have wider effects. For example, encouraging children to talk about bullying can make it easier for them to talk about other forms of abuse and harassment. And stricter controls on movement in and out of schools can help to protect the bullied child, as well as reducing the risk of unwanted adult intruders. Some schools now include action against bullying in a wider policy on personal safety.

► Schools are changing all the time. Many are trying out new ways to cope with bullying. Where this is happening it shows that the problem is being treated seriously. But no school has the answer to every problem, and no single method can be used to deal with all bullying incidents.

More traditional responses will, of course, also continue to be used. Punishments such as exclusion or expulsion can mark the seriousness with which an episode of bullying is viewed and can also help to provide a safer environment for victims. But the great majority of bullying goes unpunished so new ways of helping the hidden victims of bullying are needed. Here are some examples with a brief comment on each.

Assertive discipline – a method developed in the United States which involves a rigid system of rewards and sanctions consistently applied by all teachers in a school. It is claimed that this method helps to motivate learning and to reduce the level of classroom indiscipline but its effectiveness in coping with bullying is not clear.

Bully boxes – a simple method whereby youngsters can put their concerns on paper and post them in a 'bully box'. What happens to these notes is the key to the success or failure of

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this technique. Can genuine comments be distinguished from frivolous or malicious ones?

Bully courts – the idea that young people should play a part in making school rules and in deciding what happens to those who break them is not new. Some progressive schools introduced councils to do this over fifty years ago. More recently a few schools have tried to establish courts or councils solely to deal with bullying. However, the principle that young people should sit in judgement on their peers, and punish wrongdoers remains controversial. What is clear is that adults must play an active and guiding role in such proceedings in order to protect the welfare of all the young people involved.

Counselling – a teacher or another adult may have the skills and time to offer support to young people involved in bullying. Both bullies and victims can benefit from this process. The main problems are that it is time-consuming, the youngsters must take part voluntarily and there is a lack of trained counsellors in schools.

Mediation – some schools have introduced schemes where two parties to a relationship problem agree that a third person, who may be either an adult or another young person, helps to negotiate a solution to a problem. This seems to be helpful in many situations, especially where there is not too large an imbalance of power between the protagonists – but not in all cases of bullying. A bully may refuse to take part because he or she has no interest in ending the bullying. A victim may feel that a negotiated solution is not appropriate when it is the other person who is entirely in the wrong, or may simply be too scared to take part.

Peer counselling – a small number of secondary schools have used older teenagers as peer counsellors. Good training and continuing support is vital if these young volunteers are to be able to help victims who may be quite seriously distressed.

The 'no blame' approach – a step-by-step technique which allows early intervention because it does not require that anyone should be proved to be at fault. Children who are

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being bullied just want the bullying to stop and tend to be less worried about making sure the bullies are punished. A group of young people, which includes bystanders as well as possible bullies, is made aware of a victim's distress and is asked to suggest solutions. This approach is particularly useful in dealing with group bullying and name-calling, when it may be difficult to use more traditional remedies.

The 'shared concern' method – a Swedish technique which has much in common with the 'no blame' approach. It has not been widely used in Britain, perhaps because it is more elaborate and time-consuming. It involves a series of individual meetings between the teacher and the bullies, followed by another with the victim. Further individual meetings lead up to a group meeting of all those involved at which future behaviour is discussed and agreed. Both of these methods have been criticised for failing to allocate blame but both aim to encourage bullies to accept responsibility for their actions as well as bringing the bullying to an end.

Changing schools for the better

Most of these strategies are still experimental and they will not be suitable for dealing with all those things which we call bullying. But teachers, pupils and their families now have the opportunity to work together to develop new ideas. We can make schools change for the better so that fewer young people are forced to change schools to escape from bullying.

Some schools have used packages of training materials to help make this change happen. As well as those listed on page 29, schools in Strathclyde Region were issued with a support pack in 1995 called Promoting Positive Relationships (Bullyproofing Our School) (see the 'joint action' example on page 20). All such packages aim to help schools to introduce whole-school approaches to bullying.

The following pages give examples of how schools and the school community have started to develop ways, not just of coping with bullying, but of actually reducing the chances of it happening ■

Good schools admit that bullying happens but work to reduce it.

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"Schools with positive anti-bullying policies are better for all pupils."

Preventing Bullying

Schools which adopt positive anti-bullying policies are better schools. They are better not just for those pupils who are involved in bullying but better for all pupils and teachers. A School Board chairman in such a school described the immediate benefits:

> *"An already happy and vibrant school now has a much greater awareness of the potential problems and is able to meet them head-on before they become major."*

► If someone in your family is being bullied your main interest will be in making sure that the bullying stops. However, by encouraging a school to adopt the type of policies advocated in this booklet, you will help to bring about other improvements:

Honesty: once the school has acknowledged that bullying may be a problem it will become easier to face up to other sensitive issues.

Openness: youngsters who are encouraged to talk about bullying will also learn to speak out about related issues like child abuse, racism and sexual harassment.

Involvement: if parents, teachers, pupils and non-teaching staff all play a part in the development of a successful anti-bullying policy, the school will come to see the advantages of involving as many people as possible in discussions about other policy areas.

► Do not feel guilty about making a fuss about bullying. By doing so you will be helping many children as well as your own. Remember, bullying ruins lives. The misery experienced by a victim of purely verbal violence was described by a sixteen year old boy –

> *"I have been picked on. People think I am nothing and say anything they want to me. Every day I feel rejected. It's not that people use violence against me but I feel as if I am treated as a dustbin. I do want to come forward about this but as I am leaving in a few months I don't see any reason to do so. Nor have I the courage."* ■

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"Parents' groups can influence the work of the school in a positive and lasting way"

Joint Action – Schools and Families

Most schools have some form of organisation to help parents and the school to work together (eg a parents association or a parent/teacher association). Many Scottish schools have a School Board. Other schools have governing bodies. These bodies have different responsibilities and powers, some more formal than others. For example, School Boards will help to produce the school's policy on bullying but often will not discuss specific instances.

► Any of these organisations can be a local point for parents and teachers working together to tackle bullying. Whether your child has experienced bullying or not, if you are concerned, contact them and make sure that your voice is heard. Whether they exist to control, advise or assist, such bodies play a valuable part in supporting the school and helping to change it.

Bullying is just the sort of issue that parent associations, Boards and governing bodies should be discussing. It affects the whole school as well as individual pupils. It creates an atmosphere of fear which is bad for all pupils, including those who are not being bullied but fear they might be. Headteachers usually attend meetings of these bodies, and have a central role in discussions. The headteacher's support and active co-operation is vital if an anti-bullying campaign is to succeed.

► No school is completely free from bullying. Be very wary of any school that claims it is. Most schools recognise that bullying can happen. They will often have a policy to stop it happening. They will also help parents to stop bullying. Other schools may be reluctant to admit that bullying is a problem. It is still worthwhile asking if parents can work with such schools to develop anti-bullying strategies. This can be a first step to finding out whether children are being bullied.

Schools and families working together

One primary School Board in Scotland launched a programme which was co-ordinated by a committee of teachers and

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parents. The parent teacher association was also consulted. The headteacher described the risks involved –

> *"People could either say, 'That's a terrible school because they have bullying', or they could say, 'That's a good school because they are facing up to it. We decided to take the risk.'"*

The school's programme had four main aims:

- a series of meetings to explain the school's anti-bullying campaign (which was not based round punishment).
- to create an environment in which the children play happily together.
- to let the children contribute to the school's rules about behaviour.
- to encourage children to talk about bullying.

The school play areas were reorganised to make supervision easier and the PTA raised money to buy games to be used during wet intervals. The headteacher described the success of the programme, and its challenges:

> *"Children are now talking about bullying openly. My workload has increased and I do more counselling – we feel that we are only just starting. It has to be carried on for ever."*

By raising the issue of bullying, parents' groups and similar bodies can influence the work of the school in a positive and lasting way.

Primary and secondary schools working together

Bullying does not stop when children leave primary school. Indeed for some it becomes very much worse. Neither does it stop as young people approach adulthood, although the numbers involved do go down. Here are two examples, around the point of transition from primary to secondary school, of how schools are trying to reduce bullying.

Promoting positive relationships

One secondary school carried out surveys among its first year pupils which showed that many of them were worried about being bullied and a significant number claimed to have experienced it. Parents and teachers were also expressing concern about it. A working group of teachers from the school

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and its associated primary schools discussed the issues and looked at available materials. They agreed that:

- bullying behaviour should be tackled without attaching the negative label of 'bully' to any individual.
- the acceptable exercise of authority must be distinguished from the abuse of power, which bullying is.
- it was vital to create a climate where pupils regard bullying as unacceptable and are willing to talk to adults about it.

A programme was agreed in which bullying was included within the social education curriculum in each of the primary schools and in the first year of the secondary school. A year later a follow-up survey produced encouraging results.

> *"We were cheered by the maturity of the pupils' attitudes towards bullying. Many were not looking for retribution and many expressed considerable understanding of why some pupils displayed bullying behaviour."* *(Principal Teacher)*

Peer support

This is an idea, developed in Australia, in which older pupils volunteer to act as social education tutors to groups of first year pupils. One school trained 30 sixth year pupils to do this in a series of sessions in comfortable surroundings outside the school. They then got to know the younger students by joining them in their social education classes for four or five weeks, with the teacher present. Pairs of sixth year tutors then took groups of eight or nine pupils for a series of 30-minute sessions without the teacher present. They led discussions and activities using materials supplied by the teachers.

The tutors were able to develop their own skills by leading the groups and by working as a team. Their efforts were rewarded with certificates of merit, presented by the headteacher at a school assembly. Teachers were in no doubt that the newcomers to the school also benefited:

> *"It helped them settle into their new school, giving them an opportunity to build positive relationships with senior students whom they learn to trust and confide in – and they also get a welcome change from teachers!"*
>
> *(Principal Teacher)* ■

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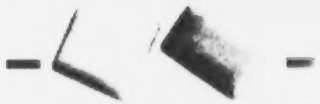

"Ask schools what they do to support new pupils."

Starting at a New School

Children transferring from primary to secondary school and those joining a class part way through a term, may be particularly vulnerable to bullying because they may have to 'break into' existing friendship groups. Parents should ask schools what they do to support new pupils.

Helping newcomers

Some schools have helped newcomers and other vulnerable children by pairing them up with an older pupil who acts as a 'buddy'. This is particularly helpful if a bullied child finds it difficult to confide in an adult. Prefects are sometimes given a group of younger children and asked to support them during their first year at school. In Scottish secondary schools, all newcomers should also be allocated to a guidance teacher who will interview them and keep an eye on their progress and welfare.

Pupils' worries

Many young people worry about being bullied when they are about to start a new school. This is not helped by people who tell tales about what happens to newcomers. In fact most of these are not true, but the threats they contain seem real – and telling threatening tales is itself a form of bullying. A sensitive child may spend weeks living a nightmare when he or she should be eagerly anticipating a new beginning. Teachers and parents should work together to counteract such gossip.

► Parents can help by encouraging discussion within the family about changing school, making new friends and bullying. They should also be aware that some worries about starting a new school may be due to 'teasing' by older members of the family and try to encourage family members and friends to be understanding of a new pupil's need for reassurance.

► Reading or being read to can be useful in helping children and young people adapt to new situations (see page 28) ■

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"The advice in this booklet applies equally to these schools"

Schools Outwith Local Authority Control

There is no evidence to suggest that bullying is any more, or less, common in schools outside local authority control. Some of these schools have played a leading role in the development of action against bullying. Such schools differ from each other in ethos, tradition and relationships with parents. However parents and/or pupils should not be hesitant about approaching the school if bullying is a problem.

► There are factors which may create special problems for families concerned about bullying. Some schools are single sex; in others girls may be vulnerable because they are in a very small minority. A few schools are still battling against long-standing traditions and practices but school 'traditions' should not explain or excuse bullying behaviour. There are also special difficulties in those schools which cater for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural problems. Furthermore, pupils who board at school do not have such easy access to support from their families and may need extra support/protection from bullies.

► All schools should have a guidance system and a personal and social education programme but these will differ from school to school; parents should ask for details if in doubt. In addition to the teaching staff you may find there are staff who are responsible for the personal welfare of pupils, for example a care worker such as a matron or nurse.

► The advice in this booklet about contacting the school and last resort action applies equally to schools outwith local authority control. The very independence of self-governing and independent schools may make appeal to higher authorities difficult, but most have governing bodies, although their powers vary widely. If you are unhappy with the outcome of your approach to the school, you should contact the school's governing body. All such schools are subject to the same system of inspection as state schools. Advice about Scottish independent schools is available from the Scottish Council for Independent Schools (address on page 26) ■

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Help is available
Keep trying until you find it

Help and Advice Beyond the School

Advice and support are available from the organisations below. Keep trying until you find it.

- ***Local authority education offices:*** If a child is assaulted at a state school, the local authority responsible for the school should have procedures for dealing with this. If the matter is serious, it should be referred to the police (see below). The local education offices should be able to give you information about policy guidelines for schools and the support available to you and your child. However, local authority structures vary and you will need to contact your local offices to identify appropriate personnel. Some local authorities employ staff with expertise in personal and social education or guidance and/or with responsibilities for multi-cultural and anti-racist education and for pupil welfare. Educational psychologists also have the training and experience to help but it is important that concerned parents make immediate contact with school staff in the first instance. If you are unhappy with the way your concerns are dealt with by the school, you should raise the problem with a senior member of staff in the local education department who will investigate your concerns (see 'Last Resort Action' page 27).

- ***Police:*** Asking the police to intervene in bullying is a drastic step but in cases of serious assault or harassment it may be unavoidable. The police may also have to be called in if the bullying happens outside school. In Scotland, the police may in turn refer the matter to the Reporter to the Children's Hearing. With a return to neighbourhood police officers and the introduction of community involvement branches, the police have started to improve links with schools, including action against bullying.

- ***Medical Advice:*** A child who is significantly injured by bullying, either physically or emotionally, should be taken to a doctor. General practitioners can call in specialists, such as hospital psychologists, where necessary.

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► ***Legal Advice:*** Going to law is usually expensive and the outcome is always uncertain but there may be occasions when legal advice can be helpful, for example if a school refuses to accept responsibility for a bullying incident. The Scottish Child Law Centre has an advice phone line and welcomes calls from families. A similar service is provided in England and Wales by the Children's Legal Centre.

Children's Legal Centre, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex CO4 3SQ. Advice line tel: 01206 873820. (Monday–Friday 10 am–12 noon and 2–5 pm).

Scottish Child Law Centre, Cranston House, 108 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8BH. Freephone for under 18s. Tel: 0800 317 500. Legal advice for parents and children. Adults' advice line. Tel: 0141 226 3737 (Tuesday–Friday 10 am–4 pm).

► ***General Advice:*** Other organisations which may be helpful include social services, the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Samaritans. Their telephone numbers are in your local phone book. Your local church, mosque or other religious organisation is also a place where personal problems can be discussed. You may also consider contacting your local community relations council.

► ***Ethnic minorities:*** Racism, and racial harassment are types of bullying which are particularly damaging to the individuals involved and to the communities in which they live. There are a number of organisations which provide advice on racism but the Commission for Racial Equality is a good starting point.

Commission for Racial Equality, Elliot House, 10–12 Allington Street, London SW1E 5EH. Tel: 0171 828 7022.

Commission for Racial Equality (Scotland), Hanover House, 45–51 Hanover Street, Edinburgh EH2 2PJ. Tel: 0131 226 5186.

Community Relations Council, (West of Scotland), 115 Wellington Street, Glasgow G2 2XT. Tel: 0141 287 6048. Advice on racial and on multi-cultural issues.

Ethnic Minorities Law Centre, 41 St Vincent Place, Glasgow G1 2ER. Tel: 0141 204 2888.

► ***Anti-bullying organisations***

Several voluntary organisations have a special interest in bullying. These include Childline, Kidscape and the Anti-

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Bullying Campaign. They provide valuable advice to children and families but how much they can do is limited by their resources and by demand on their services which may mean that phone-lines are often busy.

Anti-Bullying Campaign, Tel: 0171 378 1446 (9.30–5 pm). Advice line for parents and children. Publications for schools and parents.

Anti-Bullying Centre, Room 3125, The Arts Building, Trinity College, Dublin 2. Advice line for parents, teachers and children. Tel: Dublin 608 2573 (weekdays 10 am–5 pm). Research library open to public.

Childline, Free tel: 0800 44 11 11, Freepost 1111, London N1 0BR. Free 24 hour helpline for children and young people in danger.

Childline Scotland, Free bullying helpline tel: 0800 44 11 11 (3.30–9.30 pm). Freepost address: Childline Scotland, Freepost 1111, Glasgow G1 1BR.

Kidscape, 152 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9TR. Parents' advice line. Tel: 0171 730 3300. Bullying counsellor available on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Publications (send a large sae with two first class stamps) and advice.

Northern Ireland InterLink Children's Help Line, 121 Spencer Road, Londonderry BT47 1AE. Support service for children and young people suffering abuse, including bullying. Freephone 0800 212888 (Monday–Friday 9 am–5 pm).

Parents' Advice Centre (Northern Ireland): Franklin House, 12 Brunswick Street, Belfast BT2 7GE. Tel: 01232 238800 (weekdays 10 am–4pm). Also offices in Londonderry, Dungannon and Ballymena. Parents' Advice Centre provides a 24 hour telephone answering service.

Parentline, Endway House, The Endway, Hadleigh, Essex SS7 2AN. Family support service providing national helpline for parents/carers of children experiencing any kind of difficulty. Tel: 01702 559900. (Monday–Friday 9 am–9 pm, Saturday 1–6 pm). Outside these hours an answer phone provides local contact numbers.

► *Other sources*

Advisory Centre for Education, Tel: 0171 354 8321 (2–5 pm). Advice for parents in England and Wales. List of publications (and prices) available.

Scottish Council for Independent Schools, (SCIS) 21 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7PE. Tel: 0131 220 2106.

Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE), 15 St John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR. Tel: 0131 557 2944. Publications on bullying available (see page 29).

Scottish School Board Association, Newall Terrace, Dumfries DG1 1LW. Tel 01387 260428

This list is not comprehensive. These details were current at October 1997 ■

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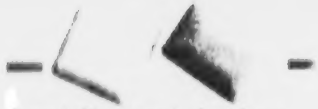

Last Resort Action

Some words of caution: these actions should force the school to take the problem more seriously but they may make future relationships between you and the teachers more difficult. Think carefully before taking these steps, but there may be times when this action is necessary.

► **Local action** (see also page 24)

- Contact the Director of Education (address in your local phone book).
- Approach your local councillor (check with your local library or the Council offices if you don't know who this is).
- Write to your member of parliament (check with your local library or the Council offices if you don't know who this is).

► **National action**

All schools in the United Kingdom and in Eire are inspected at intervals. The systems of inspection vary but all are under government control. If you have tried everything else you could write to the national government department responsible for schools and education. Currently the addresses are:

- Scotland: The Secretary of State for Scotland, St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG.
- England: The Secretary of State for Education and Employment, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT.
- Northern Ireland: The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor Co Down BT19 7PR.
- Wales: The Secretary of State for Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF1 3NQ.
- Eire: Secretary General, Department of Education, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1.

Some parents have moved their children to other schools because of bullying. Not everybody can do this and if you follow the advice in this booklet it should not be necessary ■

Remember: your child has a right not to be bullied.

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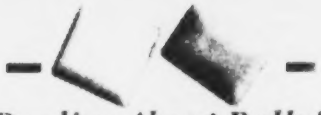

"Giving your child a book is no substitute for more direct action"

Reading About Bullying

Reading or being read to can be a good way of encouraging discussion between parents and children. Stories about starting school can help younger children talk about their worries but it is important that children understand clearly that if you are being bullied you should talk to someone. Many stories about bullying are now available. There are lists in the books by Skinner and by Tattum and Herbert (see page 29). Schools and local libraries will also have lists of books likely to appeal to readers of different ages.

► Many books, not just those mainly focused on bullying, can be used. If you want to try this approach you should:

- read the book before, or with, your child.
- discuss the story with your child.
- note that the characters in the story may well make mistakes.

But remember:

- children who do not enjoy reading should not be expected to wade through a long book.
- do not assume that the solutions adopted by the book's characters will work for your child.
- do not give your child a book to read as a substitute for more direct action.

► Older teenagers may feel less isolated after reading about someone else's experiences but they need to discuss their problems just as much as young children. If they bottle things up, their sense of loneliness and hopelessness can have serious consequences.

► **More information about bullying**

A great many books have been published about different aspects of bullying. Advice for schools and for parents and young people has also been published by education departments at national and local level. These are often less easy to find and some are highlighted on the next page ■

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► Advice leaflets for young people, family and friends

Kidscape Anti-Bullying Package (1997) (see page 26).

The following leaflets were originally distributed through schools. Your local school may still have copies:

Let's Stop Bullying – Advice for Young People. Scottish Office Education & Industry Department. To request tel: 0131 244 4485.

Let's Stop Bullying – Advice for Parents and Families. Scottish Office Education & Industry Department. To request tel: 0131 244 4485.

Bullying – Don't Suffer in Silence. Information for Parents and Families. Dept. for Education & Employment. To request tel: 0171 925 5000.

Bullying – Don't Suffer in Silence. Information for Pupils. Department for Education & Employment. To request tel: 0171 925 5000.

Let's Stop Bullying Now. Advice for Young People. Department of Education Northern Ireland. To request tel: 01247 279749.

► Advice for School Boards and governing bodies

Focus No 4: *School Boards Focus on Bullying*. Scottish Office Education & Industry Department. To request tel: 0131 244 4485.

Bullying: A Positive Response – Advice for Parents, Governors and Staff in Schools (D Tattum & G Herbert). For sale from: Countering Bullying Unit, University of Wales Institute, Cyncoed Road, Cardiff.

► Some Scottish publications

The Scottish Council for Research in Education (address on page 26) has published two packs for schools, *Action Against Bullying* and *Supporting Schools Against Bullying*. These and a report on anti-bullying action in Scotland are for sale from SCRE.

Finding Out About Bullying (Andrew Mellor) Revised 1997. SCRE Spotlight 43. Free leaflet. Also available on the SCRE Website at http://www.scre.ac.uk (look for the bullying section).

► Other sources

Bullying: An Annotated Guide to Literature and Resources. (Alison Skinner). Revised edition 1996. For sale from: The National Youth Agency, 17-23 Albion Street, Leicester LE1 6GD.

The Internet (or world wide web) is growing in importance as a source of information of all kinds. For example, calling up the Internet Bookshop (http://www.bookshop.co.uk) will give you details of relevant books to buy or borrow from libraries. Many organisations now have their own websites. You don't need your own computer to access the Internet. Libraries often have publicly available machines and trained staff who will help you search for information ■

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Bullying at School: Advice for Families

Andrew Mellor

How do you know if children or young people are being bullied? What should you do if they are? Bullying takes different forms, some less obvious than others. Good schools try to create an atmosphere where bullying is unacceptable but it can still happen. Schools which tackle bullying effectively become more open and involve more people in decision-making. They become better schools in all sorts of ways.

Many victims of bullying feel it must be their own fault and won't talk about what is going on, even to their families. This booklet provides up-to-date information and advice. It describes what families should look out for and what they can do to get help – from the school or from outside if necessary – if bullying incidents occur. It will also help families to 'bully-proof' their children by preparing them to cope with bullying behaviours and pressures at all stages of schooling. Teenagers as well as adults will find it a valuable source of information.

Sections cover: spotting the danger signs of bullying; what to do if you think someone is being bullied (including what counts as bullying); what you can expect the school to do; helping young people cope with bullying behaviour; and the ways schools try to foster social responsibility in their pupils and work with families to create and maintain safe learning environments.

Andrew Mellor is recognised internationally as an expert on action against bullying. For two years he was seconded from a teaching post to be Anti-Bullying Development Officer for Scotland. First published in 1993, this new edition of the guide for families has been substantially revised and updated.

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